

P E T E R S I R R

from *Don't hesitate*

I

Here is everything
and you can't lose it

here the early morning sunlight archive
numbered, itemised, set down

the laundry rampant in its basket
here is the museum of bending down

here the breakfast gallery
halal grocer and rained pavement annals

bus ticket trove, the chronicle of standing
of the inhalation of perfume, of headlines

urgencies of the mobile phone
eternally held, no thought erased

breath unexamined, no hair unturned, bone
unpicked

labyrinths of the least machine
here you are

locked forever
in the Museum of Soviet Calculators

websites of forgotten code
everything

somewhere
its own monument: and already

they arrive
the whitecoated, loving curators

the visitors filing past
to wonder and be wondered at

2

Cobalt door, yellow walls
wooden frame where the name will go
though still no name appears, the shelves are bare
this halal temple grocer spicery
sells winter and nervousness to the waiting street
Next door in the off-licence I buy my paper
from where the beans used to be, find
the wine has moved, the coffee shifted, the counter
is repositioned. They're ready for anything
though still no-one comes
It may never open, it may be
the deal's fallen through, the tenant run away
to Sark, to Lundy, to Sikkim

exactly now he is unrolling his blind
and selling his first umbrella of the day
while here people are travelling for miles
to come away with one hand
as long as the other, to enjoy the unfilled shelves
and conjure names into the wooden frame.
It could be theirs, this blue and yellow beacon
this fading radio station whose signal
keeps sending us home
to change our lives, to move tables, chairs
and sit on the floor in a great
cleared space imagining the shelves
of Athos, Punial, Andorra...

6

Such clarity: how
the wind blows,
the economy shrinks, disgrace

is everywhere; someone phones in, excited, it's
the young, the old,
foreigners with their hands stretched out;

today
the cloned sheep is older than her years,
arthritis flowering in her borrowed bones,

and the politician in his surprising cell
is issued the standard ration
of eggs, hash browns, toast and tea.

How many sugars? Milk or black?
His faithful driver answers a hunger,
gives us two fingers through the window

and takes off at speed; today
knows this
and takes equally in its stride

the archaeology of the toothbrush: lost
cities thrive on a bristle
and lie in wait; and still to come

the postman gunned down, the hurricane
gravely climbing the ratings,
the groomed voice

high above the tangled city
which tells us
repeatedly we're stuck, we're standing still,

the world announced all round us, the air
heavy with answers; today's
going nowhere

and not listening, today feels
at the light's edge
something stir, slow burn, today's

no-one, the guest
without argument, speechless in the studio,
nothing but a sweet blankness lodged in the bone.

Movements

I

portals
of the possible, always open, always inviting.
We go surfing the terraces
in love with brick, doors tall
beyond their station, fripperies of iron
the dog pokes a curious head through
Here lived
Leopold Bloom, the house fades
at the touch
Here we press our noses against a bakery window
hurrying bread
browse rooftops, chimney pots
someone dozing in the organ loft
of what was a church
all the original ambience preserved
swans folded on the dark canal
the dog leaping before us, attacking air
He goes off sniffing importantly
his night's on fire
and dogs go off sniffing in us, and loping
impatient cats, however we fold our necks
and lie unmoving in a palm of water
in our calm beds
Here are athletes, fugitives

leashed and unleashed by the familiar
here we look in on our ourselves and
sniffing, concentrated, anxious
move on
but at home in the movement
as we turn a corner
into a loved street
the width of it, the shape of its windows, how
the night settles on it, and it reaches
something angular, lamplit and night-sure in us
and again
past mosque, factory, park, vegetable shop
prices are born here
and raised elsewhere
crossing and recrossing the canal
who would have imagined
this little square tucked out of sight
carrying the whole lot on hods
to build our house from it

2
in early and in latter rain
to be there
and not perish
the grass
with'reth
and the flower thereof
blessed are they
blessed are the dead
and the waiting husbandman
the heaped riches
of the cathedral air
of our bodies lost in this
the music opens a giant crack
and we leap in
for a little while
labour and sorrow
and now

swallowed, winged, gladdened
surely all our days
surely some joy
unconstrained
come to rest
in the continuing place

Office Hours

The workers disappear into their buildings,
the work itself falls through the air,
sinks into corners, remembers itself.
A notebook wakes up in a drawer;
in a forgotten diary, under mounds of clutter,
the umpteenth PAYE week of the year

is drawing to a close
as early lunch floats up from the restaurant
and rain pummels the fire-escape.
Today's rain, last year's rain...
the door opens
and someone lumbers in

drenched in eighteenth-century rain,
the rain of the great squares, Luke Gardiner's rain,
the Earl of Drogheda's rain;
stands there shaking the rain from his cloak
wanting his lunch
then crosses the chessboard flagstones

and approaches us, a large, fretful
impatient gust.
But we're impatient too
and walk through him as through our own
scurrying selves that come towards us
with their stacks of paper and unmissable deadlines

and maybe one of them will stumble,
lift his head, stall
long enough to stare out a window
and sing our lost labours
in rooms for the never completed,
for the ongoing review, the unfinished application,

the meeting still searching for a conclusion.
The delicate letter weighs up its options,
the fax we have been waiting for
is coming through, the fax machine itself
is on the way
and though the diary's run out

and the taxes are paid
our working lives continue
in their own time, the cables are laid, the calls
are put through to our desks again,
our hands fallen into the air
nonetheless persist...

*

This is where they came:
addressograph, adding machine,
adhesive tape dispenser, even the ashtray.

Smoke fills the office and no-one
bats an eyelid, they're busy
with ball-point pens, box-files and bulldog clips

their thoughts are fixed on the slow clock,
the clack of coat-hangers
and consequential loss, the costs

of carbon paper and calendars.
A clerk is searching in a drawer
from which in time will emerge

a double-hole punch and a dry ink marker
while someone with a big desk
is speaking importantly into a dictaphone

and there's more to duty than drawing pins;
an invoice rots in a folder, unsuspected,
ungoverned, unforeseen, the list finder's

missing and the marginal lever
appears to be broken.
Someone reaches for paper clips,

someone is patiently removing staples
from a statement: here, at last,
is the single-hole punch,

a forest of treasury tags. All
here is shortfall, a feast of stolen
vetro-mobile files

and ghosts of effort disbelieving,
leaning against the xerox
staring at a bundle

of discarded safety statements:
the trailing cables, the blocked
access/egress routes,

the broken chair
no-one has yet rendered secure
pending disposal or repair

here is the uneliminated spillage,
the unreported life, here
are sandwiches, flasks, a language

pressed against a window staring out
rubbing the steamed glass of the words
to see what else is there

Poem

Sail out from your harbour.
Be my ambassador as I'll be yours
though silent, without credentials
and reporting nothing. Your voice pours in

the sea, the sun, every day's
destination. You arrive late
in the unmapped town, and no-one there
or everyone, and everything

beheld and remembered. The notebooks fill: how
the new boots grip and I miss
the picture, lying back in a darkened room.
Light sail into me

but very slowly, the clouds come down
in their own time. From the heights,
the precipices, your voice, last night's
fire round which a whole world gathered

but this is it too, and I'm in it
and like it. Shall I Fed-Ex
a passing car, the radio left on downstairs?
Or today's mission for supplies

to the same few streets but altered
continually? It's as if
the disk crashed, with nothing saved
and every day begins with the crank

of promising machinery: slow boot-up,
aches and buzzings giving way
to a blue silence. I can send
the date, the time, the objects considered each in its turn,

the silence that sits like a mountain
between me and the door, and the pleasure
of the slow climb over: the noise, the expectation,
the city waiting like a liner...